DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 414 CG 017 243

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TITLE	Navajo Youth and Early School Withdrawal: A Case Study. NCBR Reports.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Bilingual Research, Los Alamitos, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Mar 83
NOTE	62p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Failure; Adolescents; American Indian Culture; *American Indian Education; *American Indians; Career Planning; College Bound Students; Distance; *Dropout Characteristics; Educationally Disadvantaged; Family Environment; *High Risk Students; Language Dominance; Navajo; Secondary Education; *Student Educational Objectives
IDENTIFIERS	*Navajo (Nation)

ABSTRACT

The school dropout problem among American Indian youths is severe and complicated by the heterogeneous nature of the population and its unique social, cultural, and political history. To investigate the educational experiences of high risk Navajo youths in the areas of language minority status, traditionalism, critical markers, distance to school, and future orientation, 24 adolescents (13 males, 11 females), representing three subgroups: high school dropouts (N=6); high school seniors with no future educational plans (N=9); and college bound high school seniors (N=9), were interviewed. Interview topics included family, school history, language profiles, socialization experiences, perceptions, future plans, and work history. School and community records were also obtained. An analysis of the results showed that students whose families encouraged the development of English appeared to be more likely to do well in school and to graduate. Successful youths came from moderate homes that valued many of the Navajo traditions while adhering to many modern notions. Dropouts perceived themselves as more contemporary. In studying critical markers, student record keeping was found to be lacking as students moved between schools, making identification and planning for "high risk" students difficult. Distance to school and transportation problems affected school attendance, motivation, and the ability to go to school and to keep up with school work. Finally, college bound students had concrete future goals and plans, while graduates had some future goals and plans. Dropouts had little future orientation and no plans to improve their unemployment status. (Case studies of the six dropouts present a qualitative picture of the research findings.) (BL)

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NAVAJO YOUTH AND EARLY SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL: A CASE STUDY

NCBR Reports

Kenyon S. Chan
and
Beth Osthimer

March 1983

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study is the product of many hands and minds. Unfortunately, the people who deserve the most credit for this case study must remain anonymous in order to protect the anonymity of the community, schools, and youth who participated in the study. These anonymous persons include the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, whose dedication to the youth of her district and patience with the many changes and delays in our project deserve special credit. Also included is the Director of the district's Title IV program, who coordinated our efforts at the schools and who located staff and students for interviews. He graciously provided his time and expertise which allowed us to complete the study. Also remaining anonymous are the high school principals, counselors, and clerks who cooperated with us in locating students and student records. Finally, we are indebted to the youth and families who participated in the study.

Three community researchers deserve special recognition. All three performed their tasks with great skill and enthusiasm. Mae Benally coordinated the knowledgeable interviews and collected school and community documents. Mary Ann Smith, assisted by Roberta Franklin, had the arduous task of identifying the youth in our study, particularly the dropouts. They traveled great distances and suffered many inconveniences to locate and interview project youth.

The project was materially assisted by many NCBR staff members, including Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi, Leticia Diaz, and Lupita Tannatt, who were all part of a team with the authors in the planning and execution of the NCBR's Youth Studies. Amado Padilla and Victor Rodriguez also deserve special thanks for coordinating and editing the many drafts of this report. Finally, the NCBR support staff continue to amaze us with their efficiency and patience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from a small-scale exploratory case study of Navajo youth. In particular, the case study explored the problems faced by Navajo youth which may account for their exaggerated dropout rates from school.

This case study contrasted the educational experiences of Navajo youth from similar "high risk" backgrounds who either dropped out of school, graduated with no future educational plans, or graduated and are bound for college. The study focused on five exploratory hypotheses and presents case studies which highlight the educational history of the Navajo dropouts in the study. In addition, the following analyses were carried out: 1) The influence of family language environment and language shift on school outcome; 2) the influence of traditionalism on school outcome; 3) the identification of critical markers in the school histories of Navajo youth; 4) the impact of long distance traveling on school outcome; and, 5) the influence of students' orientation or plans for the future on their motivation to stay in school.

On the issue of family language environment, the data suggested that language shift from predominantly Navajo-speaking to a bilingual environment may exert a positive influence on Navajo youth. The first language of most of the youth was Navajo and the Navajo language is maintained and used regularly at home and in the community by the study sample. Those students whose families also encouraged the development of English appeared to be more likely to do well in school and to graduate. Most college-bound students preserved their Navajo while at the same time acquiring fluency in English.

"Traditionalism" was also investigated as a possible correlate of school outcome. Accordingly, would youth from more traditional homes be more likely to drop out of school? The data suggest that Navajo youth in the present study may represent a generation in trasition from traditional customs and beliefs to a more contemporary lifestyle. Successful youth came from "moderate" homes that valued many of the old "Navajo ways" while adhering to many modern notions. Dropouts, on the other hand, perceived themselves as more contemporary. It was speculated that perhaps the more contemporary youth had lost some of the stable characteristics of Navajo life while making a more abrupt change to a contemporary non-Indian lifestyle.

The next issue investigated was the possibility of identifying critical markers in the educational histories of Navajo youth which could serve as signals of potential problems in later schooling. While some potential markers are suggested in the report, the major finding was that the "paper trail" on Navajo youth is very thin. Because of the many educational authorities which oversee American Indian education, American Indians have the opportunity to go to federally controlled schools, public schools on and off the reservation, tribally controlled

schools, and private or parochial schools. Student record keeping is not well coordinated nor is there an immediate transfer of records as a student moves from one kind of school to another. Therefore, it is difficult to use school records for planning or diagnostic purposes, or to identify "at-risk" students early before the cycle to drop out begins.

The impact of distance to school on academic progress was also probed. Navajo youth often travel up to 140 miles a day to school. Some school authorities suggested that distance and transportation problems may exacerbate the educational difficulties of Navajo youth. The evidence suggests that distance and transportation problems affected school attendance, motivation, and the ability to go to school and to keep up in school work. Suggestions are explored which may lessen some of the problems associated with long transportation to school.

Finally, students' feelings of personal control or planning for the future was explored. In the current study, dropouts, graduates and college-bounds differed in their orientation towards the future. College-bound students had concrete plans for their future education and careers; graduates had some notions of their careers and had some plans for future training or experiences to improve their careers. Dropouts, in contrast, had vague notions of the future and had no plans to enhance their present status, which consisted largely of unemployment. Suggestions are offered which might assist dropouts to attach their actions to consequences such that they might learn personal control techniques that ideally result in better future planning.

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I. BACKGROUND

In 1970, Bernard Spolsky undertook a census of Navajo children born in 1964, collecting language information on approximately 80% of all the Navajo children in that age cohort. In 1982, 12 years later, this age cohort is about to graduate from high school. A small number of these youth who have either dropped out of school, graduated and are college-bound, or graduated but with no immediate plans to continue their education were selectively sampled for a case study. From this small case study, hypotheses can be generated and policy recommendations developed to enhance the educational progress of Navajo youth.

Statement of the Problem

According to a recent analysis of research, children from non-English language backgrounds are "at-risk" of school failure in American schools (Steinberg, Blinde & Chan, 1982). Dropout rates for language minority populations may be three to five times greater than those for other youth. Indeed, as the dropout rates for white and black youths have declined and become relatively stable over the past decade, the dropout rates for Hispanics and Native Americans have slowly increased.

Steinberg et al.'s (1982) analysis of extant research revealed several remarkable points. First, and perhaps most important, is that little is known about the characteristics and scope of the dropout problem among language minority youth. Few studies have been conducted on this population and fewer yet separate the influence of non-English language background status from other equally important factors such as socioeconomic status. While both of these factors contribute to placing a student in a "high risk" situation, existing evidence suggests that language background factors may be an independent

influence on school completion. Therefore, it would appear that an investigation of the characteristics and scope of the dropout problem among language minority youth would be warranted.

Steinberg et al. also conclude that existing data show that the dropout problem among American Indian youth is severe, complex, and as yet insufficiently studied. Estimates of the number of Native American dropouts range from 28.6% to 60% of any age cohort depending on factors such as the definition of dropouts or the subgroup under investigation. Analysis of the educational progress of American Indian youth is complicated by the heterogenous nature of American Indian sub-populations and the unique social, cultural, and political history of American Indians in the United States. Some American Indians have retained their native language while others have not. While studies of one tribal group of American Indans may yield important generalizable information, the unique characteristics and histories of individual tribal groups prevent the researcher from ascertaining features that can be identified with American Indians as a whole.

The present case study focuses on the problems of Navajo-speaking youth. This group of students shares many of the typical problems facing students from non-English speaking backgrounds in school. In addition, they face problems that emerge out of their unique Navajo heritage, vis-a-vis their social and cultural history.

Navajos* constitute the largest native American tribe, representing over 160,000 persons. The Navajo tribal education department estimates that there are between 65,000 to 75,000 Navajo

*For the purpose of this report we use the term Navajo to refer to the American Indian groups who often refer to themselves as Diné.

school age children. Recent analyses by Lopez (1982) suggest that 93% of all Navajos report Navajo as their mother tongue. This is impressive considering that the language retention rate for all other Native American groups is only about 23%. Navajos continue to be a largely rural population residing in or around the Navajo Reservation, which straddles Arizona and New Mexico. The Navajo population is generally younger and has lower levels of education and socioeconomic status than the general population. The Navajo have a very strong cultural tradition and tribal government and the democratically elected tribal government has been a strong and active force for the Navajo people.

The educational progress of Navajo youth has been of major concern to tribal leaders and educators for a long time. The formal education of Navajos began in the 1860's when Congress assigned the responsibility for the education of American Indians to various religious groups (Thompson, 1975). This early form of education was designed to "civilize" and "Christianize" the Indian population. It is important to note that English was designated as the medium of instruction; Indian languages and cultural practices were excluded in these educational programs.

Findings from the Indian Reorganization Act of 1834 and the Meriam Report of 1928 were to lead to the growth of on-reservation, federally funded day and boarding schools. Under the terms of the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934, a gradual withdrawal of federal control over educational programs and other services to American Indians began. By 1972, in accordance with the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act, Indian tribes were able to play a self-determining role the education of their children. Under the "638 option," for instance, those tribes that elect to operate in accordance with this clause exercise direct control over the content and processes of their schooling programs. Such directly controlled programs have also allowed the inclusion of Indian languages and culture in the instruction of American Indians.

According to Thompson (1975), early attempts to educate the Navajos were met with considerable resistance. Part of this resistance was the result of the negative experiences that Navajos had encountered with federal agencies and personnel who often used force to fill the enrollments at boarding schools for indians. The attempts to introduce a western mode of education to the Navajos also met with initial failure. Traditional Navajo education was based on modeling, observation, and hands-on learning. The classroom instruction that federal agents and Christian missionaries attempted to introduce were totally foreign to the Navajo people. In more recent times, however, the commitment to education among the Navajo has grown. According to former tribal chair Chee Dodge, "we have had a taste of education. We like the taste and we want more." (Thompson, 1975, p.28).

A desire for more, and better, education is a strong theme in current tribal policy. The Navajo Times, which is the largest newspaper serving Native Americans, regularly reports on the achievements and progress of Navajo youth. The tribal government also strongly supports its youth in acquiring post-secondary educational experiences and job training. The Navajo tribe supports its own schools and has one of the few tribally controlled community colleges in the United States. The tribe regularly budgets money for the support and welfare of children in boarding schools and to support Navajo students in college. Adult education has also been strongly supported by tribal leaders. Clearly, the modern Navajo community believes that the education of its youth is its single most important resource.

Committment to education alone has proven not to be enough. The educational progress of Navajo youth is still not bright. With 70% of Navajo children entering school with no English or limited English proficiency and the poverty level of Navajo families among the highest in the nation, it is not surprising that between 28% to 60% of Navajo youth do not complete high school. These rates, which are three to six

times higher than the average, portend social problems that have implications beyond the Indian community. It is the purpose of our study to provide a preliminary and limited analysis of this complex educational problem.

This report documents a small scale case study aimed at qualitatively examining the educational paths of selected Navajo youth which may result in speculative hypotheses, policy recommendations, and more definitive questions for future research.

II. PROCEDURES

The study was designed as a small scale field investigation of Navajo youth in public school. Basic information on the general characteristics of the community was collected from available public documents. Original data were collected from three sources: 1) Extensive interviews with community experts on Navajo education and youth; 2) extensive interviews with selected Navajo youth; and 3) an analysis of available school records of the interviewed youth. After a brief description of the field site community, a description of the research procedures and instruments is presented.

The Field Site

This study was conducted in a small Southwestern city bordered by the Navajo Indian reservation. The public school system serves large numbers of Navajos both residing "in town" and on the reservation. The city is a major economic draw in the area and is the focus of much of the economic activity for Navajos residing in and around the city limits.

Approximately 40,000 individuals reside within the city limits. Thousands of other individuals in the surrounding area also rely on city services. The city serves as the county seat and the area hub for transportation, business, financial, and cultural activities for the surrounding area.

The city is served by two local daily newspapers and one weekly paper. It is the site of a major state university which serves as the center for much of the cultural activities in the area. In addition to the university and to other government related employment, the city and its surrounding area are supported by a large lumbering industry and a significant tourist trade.

The local public schools are organized into a unified K-12 system with a total enrollment of less than 10,000 students. American Indians (mostly Navajos) comprise about 15% of the student population. There are fourteen public elementary and junior high schools; two high schools serve youth from the tenth to twelfth grades. The public schools service the western portion of the Navajo reservation and the numerous Navajos residing in town. An in-town dormitory is provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Navajo youth who reside in remote areas or who otherwise require living in the in-town facilities. According to a recent study, the median family income in the area is less than $15,000.00 (Beckhelm, 1979).

Community Site Researchers

Ethnic research, such as that conducted in this study, requires special procedures to ensure careful and reliable collection of information. One special procedure designed as part of the study was the recruitment and training of community-based site researchers.

It is generally agreed that ethnic groups, such as Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, are "closed" to researchers who are not members of the community. While no research is available on the subject, research employing questionnaires, interviews, and other face-to-face encounters is thought to be more reliable if members of the target ethnic groups are used to collect the data. When conducting research on language minority populations, where English may not be the medium in which the interview or questionnaires are given, bilingual researchers are an absolute necessity. Finally, when conducting exploratory research in ethnic communities where very little is known, community-based researchers provide valuable insight during the preparation for data collection as well as during the analysis of the data.

All three of these conditions were present in this study of Navajo youth. While youth in general are often difficult subjects for interviews or questionnaires, Navajo youth are thought by many knowledgeable individuals to be particularly reticent in terms of revealing inside information to strangers. It was also likely that most of our target youth would be Navajo/English bilinguals and often more comfortable revealing insider information in the Navajo language. It was also likely that discussions with parents would be conducted in the Navajo language.

Relatively little is known about Navajo youth. Community-based Navajo researchers were the most likely experts in terms of providing insights and contributing to the analysis of our theoretically based and non-Navajo culture bound interview schedules and hypotheses. Therefore, three highly experienced Navajo field workers were hired and trained during the course of the study. All three were Navajo women living in the target community. Each was college trained with extensive experience with school programs, Navajo youth, and community research. They were all fluently bilingual in Navajo and English.

One community researcher focused her attention on the collection of school documents, school records, and interviews with school and community experts in Navajo education and/or youth. Two other community researchers focused their at79Qion on identifying youth within the target cohort, tracking selected students, and conducting youth interviews. All three researchers were extensively trained for their tasks and provided valuable feedback and criticism to NCBR based staff on potential research hypotheses, techniques, interview schedules, approach to the community and the school, and on community relations.

Selected Knowledgeables

The LMY literature review conducted by the NCBR (Steinberg et al., 1982) revealed that little is known about why some language minority youth drop out of school. With respect to Native American youth, and Navajos in particular, the literature is scant. We know little about them either before or after school entry, and even less about possible reasons for their early school-leaving. To help fill this gap, and in order to begin to develop preliminary hypotheses regarding Navajo youth and their educational experiences, we developed an interview guide for expert "knowledgeables." Our field site staff used this guide to elicit some informed speculation from 17 individuals who through reputation were identified as being knowledgeable about education and/or Navajo youth in the case-study area. Those interviewed included high school counselors, community youth workers, juvenile crime authorities, tribal leaders, and school officials.

Selected Navajo Youth

In order to speculate about factors which may influence the educational paths of Navajo youth, three contrast groups were selected. These groups represented Navajo youth who would graduate from high school in the spring of 1982 with plans to go to college (college-bounds); those who will graduate but have no immediate plans to attend college (graduates); and those who dropped out of high school before graduation for reasons other than illness, and who are not enrolled in other formal education programs and have not received a Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED). These three groups formed the contrast groups for the remainder of the study. The study was limited to Navajo students enrolled in the 9th grade in the fall of 1978. These students represent the senior class of 1982 which graduated at the time of the study. This cut-off date somewhat biases the sample selection in that Navajo youth who drop out before the 9th grade may not be represented in the sample pool.

School district records listing the enrolled Navajo population within the school district for 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1981 were obtained, as was the graduation list for the spring of 1982. Navajo students were spread over four junior high schools for the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, and two high schools for 10th, 11th and 12th grades. A special Indian counselor was available at each of the junior and senior high schools. These counselors were available to the researchers and examined each yearly census of Navajo students.

Following the class of 1982 from their 9th grade year, we were able to determine which students continued normally in school, and which students were retained, transferred, or withdrew from school early. For the purpose of the current study, only normally continuing students and students who withdrew early were considered. From our analysis of school records, approximately 37% of the 1982 cohort available in the 9th grade will graduate, 20% dropped out early, and 43% transferred or were otherwise "lost."

The total class of 1982 cohort was approximately 172 Navajo students. Of that number 14%, or 24 youths, were selected for interviews. Nine were identified as college-bound, nine were graduates with no plans to continue, and six were high school dropouts. It is important to remember that our analysis is a cumulative estimate of school outcome, not a yearly calculation. Cumulative estimates may give a clearer picture of school outcome for any particular age cohort of youth, since youth who drop out early in their high school careers and who do not return are still considered a negative school outcome for the remainder of the educational history of that particular cohort. Further, considering that our analysis of this age cohort began in the 9th grade and that the compulsory school requirements for the state in which are field site resides end at the completion of 8th grade, it is unknown how many youths drop out before the period of our analyses, this methodological difficulty presents limitations with regard to the

accuracy of our dropout estimates for the age cohort (which is likely to be an under-estimate) and limits our speculation as to those youth who at least entered the 9th grade.

Table 1 provides a summary of the basic characteristics of the youth sample. As evident in that Table, 13 males and 11 females were interviewed. Each of the subgroups were approxmately the same age: dropouts were 18.7 years old; graduates, 18.6; and collegebounds, 18.3. All but two of the youth were born in or around the Navajo reservation. Two college-bound students were born outside the immediate vicinity of the reservation (one in Tucson, one in Los Angeles). Thirteen reported Navajo as their first language, and eleven reported English as their first language. All but one student were bilingual in Navajo and English and reported that both languages were spoken in their homes and community.

Place of residence during high school was thought to be a potential influence on the educational progress of Navajo youth. High school students could either live at home within the city area (in-town students), or on the reservation and ride the bus to school (reservation students); they could also reside in the in-town dormitories provided and supervised by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These three forms of residences are distributed among the youth interviewed and are reported in Table 1. In-town students living with their families at home went to either of the two available high schools; they lived an average of 1.9 miles from school. Dormitory residents went to the westside high school which was approximately less than a mile from their dormitory. The average distance from school to their home was 47 miles and ranged from 22 to 70 miles. Most dormitory youths returned home for weekends. Youths residing on the reservation were bused into town and enrolled in the eastside high school. The average distance for these students was 48 miles from school with a range from 42 to 67 miles. The duration of the bus ride for these

students was over an hour each way for most of the students with a significant increase in time during the winter months.

Table 1: Summary of Sample Characteristics

Group	Age (in years)	Males/Females	First language Navajo/English	Place of residence during high school Dorms/in-town/bus
Dropouts N=6	18.7	4/2	3/3	2/2/2
Graduates N=9	18.6	6/3	6/3	3/2/4
College-bounds N=9	18.3	3/6	4/5	3/4/2
Total sample	18.5	13/11	13/11	8/8/8

Once a sample pool of students was identified, the difficult task of locating students and obtaining permission to participate began. The community research staff went to great lengths to locate and contact potential interviewees for this study. Locating these students involved numerous trips to the reservation, often at distances over 175 miles each way from town, often on dirt roads. The purpose of these trips was to locate students, obtain informed consents, and conduct interviews. Many of the youths do not have telephones in their homes, so personal and repeated contacts were necessary in order to obtain these interviews. The massive task of completing these interviews would not have been accomplished without the persistent efforts of the community researchers. Approximately 100 youths were contacted or tracked by the field staff. This often involved visits to relatives, neighbors and workplaces in an effort to solicit the youths' participation, or to determine if he or she would be available for the study. Nearly all identified dropouts for the 1982 cohort were

contacted or determined to be unavailable (e.g., military service, moved out of state), and the final number of dropouts interviewed constitutes the total number of youth available for interviewers from the class of 1982 cohort.

The youths were from families with largely low socioeconomic status. Of the 48 parents, three were white collar workers, four were service workers, 13 were blue collar workers, one was in sales; 20 were unemployed, three were deceased, and no employment information was available on four parents.

Data Collection

Four kinds of data were collected as part of this case study. These were school and community documents; interviews by "knowledgeables"; youth interviews, and student cumulative school records. A brief description of each is provided below.

School and community documents. Through the efforts of field site staff, who were materially assisted by the school district, we obtained documents and information related to school district practices and procedures in the general areas of instruction, curriculum, grading, testing, and attendance. In addition to this information, we gathered school policy documents to help us interpret the interviews and student records. In the area of community documents, we gathered data on the general demographic characteristics of the area, the history of the school district, and the nature of Navajo experiences with various educational systems on and off the reservation over time.

Interviews with "knowledgeables." NCBR field staff conducted a series of interviews with experts on Navajo youth in the local field site area. Each interview was semi-structured and open-ended, tailored somewhat to the particular expertise of the person being interviewed. For instance, questions were modified if the interviewee was

knowledgeable about youth unemployment or outside-of-school training, and modified again for high school counselors. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into potential reasons for the exaggerated dropout rate and school failure among American Indian youth and into what is or can be done to moderate this problem. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Youth interviews. The youth interviews were semi-structured, opened-ended interviews. Topics for the interviews included the following:

a. general demographics

b. family background

c. school history, including place of residence during periods of schooling

d. parent profiles and educational histories

e. language profiles

f. basic socialization experience

g. perceptions of schooling

h. future plans

i. reasons for dropping out (if applicable)

j. work history

Student records. In addition to interviewing each youth, we analyzed his or her academic cumulative records: grades, test scores, attendance and teacher comments. Our analysis revealed that almost every record was incomplete with respect to at least some of these factors. In addition, the variety of educational experiences of Navajo

youth before entering public school (BIA boarding schools on the reservation, other federal schools, public schools on the reservation, and public schools in towns adjacent to the reservation) makes analysis of often non-comparable information quite difficult.

III. EXPLORATORY HYPOTHESES REGARDING NAVAJO DROPOUTS

A number of exploratory hypotheses have been generated as a result of our review of literature and intensive interviews with experts knowledgeable about Navajo youths and dropouts. The analysis for the youth interviews focused on each of these hypotheses and explores the potential of each hypothesis in providing a better understanding of Navajo youth. The limits imposed by this case study, however, prevent absolute determination of the validity of each hypothesis, but can provide exploratory comment on each issue.

Exploratory Hypothesis #1: Language Minority Status

> Navajo youth from non-English language backgrounds drop out of school at higher rates than other Navajo youth.

Non-English language background would appear to be a major characteristic of Navajo youth. Lopez (1982) reports that over 93% of all Navajos are from Navajo-speaking backgrounds. Further, Spolsky (1970) reported that over 70% of all Navajo children enter school with limited or no English proficiency. It is important to note that the 5 year old Navajos interviewed by Spolsky in 1969 are from approximately the same age cohort as the youth interviewed in the present study. Sixty-six percent of the youth in our study reported Navajo as the language spoken before entering school. The remainder reported speaking English before entering school. Therefore, our sample would appear to approximate the survey sample drawn by Spolsky. Further, only one youth (a bilingual English/Spanish dropout) reported no experience with the Navajo language. Ninety-six percent of our sample came from backgrounds in which Navajo was spoken in the home. This approximates Lopez' population estimation. At the time of the interview, all youth reported speaking English well or very well.

Language background prior to the beginning of school was determined by a merging of two factors which included language spoken by the youth before entering school and language usually spoken at home before entering school. The youths could indicate English, Navajo or a combination of languages. Navajo dominant environments were determined to be those in which the Navajo language was prominent before entering school, while English dominant environments were those in which the English language was prominent before entering school. Table 2 presents the breakdown of students in these two categories.

Table 2: Language Environment Before Entering School

Language Environment	School Outcome			
	Dropouts N=6	Graduates N=9	College Bound N=9	Total Sample N=24
Navajo Dominant	66%	66%	55%	63%
English Dominant	33%	33%	45%	37%

As shown in Table 2, most of the sample came from Navajo language dominant environments before they entered school. While English was predominant for 37% of the sample, only one youth had no exposure to Navajo. It appears from the data presented in Table 2 that the language environments of the sample groups did not vary markedly and are quite similar to findings of other estimates (Spolsky, 1970; Lopez, 1982).

Since the youth in each of the three categories of school outcome had similar language environment characteristics before entering school, early childhood language environment may not be a determining factor of school outcome. Rather, language environment during the school years and language shift (from Navajo to English) may be a determinant of school performance.

Current language use was determined through a series of questions asking youth to indicate which language(s) they usually speak now; which language they usually speak at home, to their friends, and in the community; and their self-rating of proficiency in both Navajo and English. Three categories of students were determined: 1) Navajo dominant; 2) Navajo/English bilingual; and 3) English only. All youth by this time in their lives speak English, but some use Navajo and are in environments that promote Navajo, while others are not. A Navajo dominant youth was determined to be one who currently uses Navajo in most circumstances and rates his or her Navajo oral language abilities as "pretty well or very well." A Navajo/English bilingual was determined to be a youth who usually speaks both Navajo and English equally across situations and reports competence in both Navajo and English in the "pretty well to very well" range. An English-only student reported using only English in all situations and reported poor to no ability in the Navajo language. Table 3 reports on these three categories of students.

Table 3: Current Language Use

Language Environment	School Outcome			
	Dropouts N=6	Graduates N=9	College Bound N=9	Total Sample N=24
Navajo Dominant	50%	11%	22%	25%
Navajo/English Bilingual	33%	77%	56%	58%
English Only	17%	11%	22%	17%

As can be seen from Table 3, Dropouts appear to be in environments in which Navajo is dominant much more so than other outcome groups. Graduates and College Bounds shift from Navajo dominant environments in

early childhood (see Table 2) to more mixed language settings during the high school age period. Youth in English-only environments were youth who never experienced the Navajo language and had no fluency in Navajo either in early childhood or in their youth.

Of the youth who reported Navajo as the dominant, and sometimes only, language in early childhood, four were dropouts, six were graduates and five were college-bounds. Of these students, two drop outs, five graduates and three college-bounds reported a shift from a Navajo dominant language environment to an English dominant language environment for the period between kindergarten and high school. Thus, one can speculate that shift from a predominantly Navajo language environment to a more balanced bilingual environment has positive educational effects. Note further that relatively successful college bound students did not give up their Navajo language in order to perform well in school. They still report great reliance on and competence in the Navajo language.

The influence of language environment on educational outcome appears important, but why some youth experience a shift from a Navajo dominant environment to an English dominant environment is not clear. Further, it is not clear if a shift in language environment directly influences school outcome or is mediated by other factors. What influences language shift and what the language environment, in turn, may influence is still open to speculation. Other exploratory hypotheses may help illuminate the speculation.

Exploratory Hypothesis #2: Traditionalism

"Traditionalism" negatively influences school outcome.

Traditionalism can be defined as strong adherence to beliefs, customs, teaching, or other cultural features handed down formally or informally from generation to generation. In order to sustain a culture, fundamental principals, beliefs or behaviors are passed from

adults to children. Traditionalism can be a positive socialization force within a community and a family. It can provide stability and cohesiveness to one's social group. Traditionalism within small ethnic and cultural groups which are embedded in a larger social fabric, however, may be detrimental to an individual's development. Chan and Rueda (1979) suggested that minority youth often find themselves in conflict with school expectations which are more likely a product of culture conflict between the minority culture and school then a product of minority youth incompetence or socialization inadequacies of the home.

One might speculate that as minority families adhere more and more to traditional values, beliefs, behaviors and the like, they will experience greater school conflict and, thus, negative school outcomes. Indeed, many of the experts interviewed concerning Navajo dropouts suggested traditionalism as a potential problem: Dropouts were seen as coming from more traditional or more "old-fashioned" Navajo homes; successful youth were predicted to come from more modern, forward-looking homes.

Two indicators of traditionalism designed in the current study were language shift and ratings of traditionalism by the interviewees. As discussed in the previous section, language shift did seem to separate school outcome groups. One could speculate that remaining in a Navajo language environment would be associated with more conservative cultural attitudes. The data present in Table 4 are self-ratings of traditionalism, which appear to contradict the language shift indicator.

As can be seen, dropouts report more often living in contemporary homes while college-bound students lived in moderate homes. Contemporary life styles were described by youth as having modern conveniences, new homes, and paying less attention to old traditions.

Table 4: Ratings of Traditionalism

Rating	School Outcome			
	Dropouts N=6	Graduates N=9	College Bound N=9	Total Sample N=24
Contemporary	50%	33%	11%	29%
Moderate	33%	22%	66%	41%
Traditional	16%	22%	22%	16%
Don't know	--	22%	22%	13%

Moderate families were described by the youth as a mixture of old traditions and new conveniences. Perhaps the moderate life style, more evident in the college-bound sample, is an indication of a blend between stable family/Navajo traditions with contemporary adjustments to living in modern America. One might speculate that contemporary life styles, which may mean the forfeiture of Navajo traditions, result in instability during the adjustment period or, in other words, a temporary normlessness which might negatively influence school outcome. These bold speculations must be viewed with great caution and require detailed study. Indeed, because of the preliminary nature of our data, differences in traditionalism ratings may be a function of research error alone.

In any event, two indicators of traditionalism appear to be in conflict. While dropouts appear to maintain Navajo language environments more than other youth, they also reported living in more contemporary homes. Almost all of the youth in our study began early childhood in Navajo-speaking homes. During the ensuing 18 years of their lives, Navajos, as a group, encouraged the transition from traditional reservation life to a more contemporary off-reservation life. The youth in our study can be considered the children of

transition. Is it possible that moderate transition, with its maintenance of some stable Navajo traditions, is more advantageous to the development of youth than an abrupt transition to a contemporary non-Navajo life-style? While this speculation is intriguing, much further work must be completed. The relationship between traditionalism and the educational and psychological development of Navajo youth warrants careful investigation.

Exploratory Hypothesis #3: Critical Markers

> Critical markers can be identified in the educational experiences of Navajo students which distinguish dropouts from graduates.

The literature suggests that certain indicators in the educational paths of students can be identified which distinguishes dropouts from graduates. For instance, Lloyd (1978) reported that third grade reading and language achievement scores, grade-point average, measured IQ, and grade retention prior to third grade are excellent predictors of eventual high school dropout or graduate status. Bachman and his colleagues (Bachman, Green & Wirtanen, 1971; Bachman, O'Malley & Johnson, 1971) noted that students retained one grade are four times more likely to drop out than other students. Further, they reported that half the students with D averages drop out of school. The general high-risk characteristics of potential dropouts would include low reading and language achievement, low grades, grade retention, negative school attitudes or behavior, more likely to be absent or truant, more likely to be suspended or expelled, less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and have lower educational and career aspirations (see Steinberg et al., 1982, for a review).

If critical markers can be identified, school personnel are in a better position to detect and intervene in problems when identified. Early intervention may prove more efficient and effective if high-risk students can be adequately identified and monitored. Research on critical markers for language minority youth, however, is scant. No

research on the critical markers for American Indian students could be located. Therefore, the present case study examined student records and student recollections in order to outline potential markers for future research.

The analysis of the educational history of Navajo youth presented a number of difficult challenges. First, like many other American Indian populations, Navajo students attended a variety of schools during their educational histories. Navajos have the option of attending public schools on and off the reservation, BIA boarding schools, federal schools on and off the reservation, and tribally controlled schools. These variations in school types lead to much confusion when attempting to analyze school records. Nearly all of the students were missing elementary school records. In their attempt to locate early school records, field site personnel contacted many of the non-public schools that the students attended. These tended to be small rural schools, and records were often no longer available. Further, student records were not routinely sent with the student to the next school.

Next, because of the variety of school placement options for Navajos, the data that were available lacked comparability. Each school used different tests, labeled courses differently, and used different grading systems. Some encouraged and included teacher comments, while others did not.

Test scores. The most complete data available on the cohort of students in the case study begins with junior high school student achievement test scores. All students enrolled in the target district during the 7th and 8th grades were administered the reading, language, and math sections of the Stanford Achievement Test. Stanine scores were reported and are summarized by group in Table 5.

Table 5: Average Stanine Scores by School Outcome Group

	Dropouts	Graduates	College Bound
7th Grade Achievement			
Reading	3.7	3.25	4.6
Language	4.4	4.6	4.8
Math	3.7	4.5	5.0
8th Grade Achievement			
Reading	4.7	4.8	4.6
Language	4.3	4.4	5.0
Math	4.3	5.0	5.2

In the seventh grade, the reading scores for dropouts were slightly higher than those for high school graduates; both were considerably lower than scores for college-bound youth (averages 3.7, 3.25, 4.6 stanines, respectively). The language scores from the SAT administrations were about the same across the three groups (4.4 for dropouts, 4.6 for graduates, 4.8 for college-bound youth). However, seventh grade math scores appeared to separate the dropouts from the other students: The average score for dropouts was 3.7, compared to 4.5 and 5.0 for graduates and college-bound youth. In the eighth grade, a similar pattern was evident: Reading and language scores did not vary a great deal; these were mostly below the 5th stanine, which the district uses as an indicator of minimum proficiency in its competency testing program. Reading scores averaged 4.7 for dropouts, 4.8 for graduates and 4.6 for college-bound youth. While language scores did not vary between dropouts and graduates, they did appear to separate collegebound youth from other youth (4.3, 4.4 and 5.0, respectively). The math scores at the eighth grade level again appeared to separate dropouts from other students (4.3 as compared to 5.0 and 5.2).

Grades. It was not possible to analyze student grades due in large part to incomplete data and non-comparability in grading practices. Navajos in our cohort attended a variety of educational settings during their educational experience before they entered public schools (BIA boarding schools, public schools on and off the reservation, federally controlled schools off the reservation and tribally controlled schools). In addition, once enrolled in the target schools under study, students were enrolled in different classes in the same subject area. For instance, English courses may be taken in the standard grade level English class, English-as-a-second language class, vocational English, "Reading-Writing Laboratory," or "English Improvement" course. Comparing grades across courses would not prove useful.

Courses. Since grades prove not to be a valid method of course work comparison, an analysis of the kinds of courses taken by the cohort was conducted. All these student outcome groups took some vocational classes, work experience programs, and English-as-a-second language (ESL) courses. While college-bound students tended to take more math courses, particularly advanced math courses, college-bound students and graduates studied typing, shop, machanical drawing, and on-the-job-training courses. College-bound students tended to be enrolled more often in specific work-study programs and felt they received beneficial counseling and assistance from the program in their preparation for their post-high school life. Both college-bound students and graduates took courses related to their post-graduation goals (pre-college foundations or work-related courses), while dropouts often left school before they were eligible for courses more directly related to the post-high school experience. No evidence of rigid tracking policies were detected.

Transfer and absentee rates. Frequency of school transfers and absence rates were mentioned by several knowledgeables as potential high risk markers of potential dropouts. In analyzing the number of transfers between schools for our sample of students, it did not appear that the frequency of school transfers distinguished the contrast groups. Transfer rates for the students ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 7. In general, it would be expected that students will at least experience three different schools: Elementary, junior high school and high school. Transfer rates greater than three would indicate some transience. Transfer rates for the three contrast groups were similar and moderate with an average of 4.5 for dropouts, 4.4 for graduates, and 4.1 for collegebound students. Unfortunately, no reliable information could be found in the student records or from student interviews which could illuminate why students transferred. It is more probable that the reasons for transferring, rather than simply the number of transfers, would be the significant predictor of school outcome.

Absence from school is found to be correlated with academic success (see Steinberg et al., 1982). All dropouts in our sample reported good to very good attendance records in elementary school with unexcused absences increasing in high school. It appeared from our interviews that most absences at the elementary level were attributed to illness, but beginning at the junior high school level, lack of interest or "boredom" became the reason for absences. Many dropouts, on the other hand, reported missing entire weeks of school because of transportation problems from home to school or from home to the in-town dormitory, a point which we will elaborate later. Unlike dropouts and graduates, college-bound students reported low absence rates and reported enjoying school. Our analysis supports others (see Steinberg et al., 1982) who identify absence rates as an important marker of potential dropouts. Absence rates alone, however, are not useful. Rather, retrospective explanations of absences by the three contrast groups reveal that high absence rates for dropouts reflect a more

fundamental lack of interest or incentive to be in school, as compared to graduates or college-bound students. Therefore, while high absence rates should signal a warning of a potential school dropout problem, sound counseling the student regarding the benefits of staying in school should be undertaken.

No further analysis of school records was undertaken. The lack of comparability in the student records did not allow for systematic retrospective analysis of grades, test scores, teacher comments, and other variables. This was quite disappointing in light of the project's goal to identify critical markers that could serve as early warning signals of potential dropouts. From the limited information available, Navajo youth in the three contrast groups proved to be more similar than different.

Summary. While college-bound students performed somewhat better than other students in math and language achievement, reading achievement was similar across all three groups. The mix of high school courses taken by the contrast groups did not indicate any overt tracking, except that college-bound students tended to enroll in advanced math courses while graduates tended to enroll in work-study courses. The course histories of dropouts indicated that they often dropout of school prior to being eligible to enroll in work experience courses. In this regard, early school leaving did not allow the dropouts to benefit from courses most directly related to post-high school experiences. It is ironic that dropouts report high absence rates because of lack of interest or boredom, yet they had not advanced in their school careers enough to enroll in work experiences or other post-school relevant courses which are often found by students to be very interesting and directly relevant. Perhaps the introduction of career oriented course work earlier in the school experience would provide some incentive to stay in school.

The question of critical markers remains unanswered. The limitations of the present study did not allow for a thorough restrospective analysis of the educational histories of the cohort. Further, judging from the limited data gathered, the paper trail related to Navajo youth is quite thin.

School records, when judiciously maintained, offer key data which can facilitate the careful monitoring of high-risk populations, like Navajo students, and can provide school personnel with rich diagnostic information and early warning signals. Careful documentation of achievement and grades, school behavior, parent conferences, transfer and absentee rates, and counselor contacts could provide important information possibly leading to the early identification of high risk youth before they drop out.

Further, because of the multiple school options available to American Indians, it would appear desirable for school authorities from the public schools, BIA schools, tribally controlled schools, and other educational settings to establish cooperation between agencies to standardize the content and transfer of student records. Carefully documented and detailed student records could prove invaluable to counselors and other school staff charged with preventing school failure and early withdrawal. All efforts must be made to ensure that the school records of transferred students travel with the students to their new schools.

Exploratory Hypothesis #4: Distance from School

The distance that Navajo youth travel to school influences their school outcome.

During the knowledgeable interviews many experts cited the long distances between the reservation and the high school as a potential problem leading to high dropout rates. Except for the in-town

students, many of the Navajo youth traveled distances up to 70 miles to get to their high school.

As reported earlier, each of the three contrast groups included youth who lived in-town, on the reservation, or in the in-town dormitory. Dormitory students lived an average of 47 miles from the dormitory, and most returned home for weekends. Youth traveling from the reservation to school each day lived an average of 48 miles from school, with a range of from 42 to 67 miles.

Transportation and distance problems for all non-town youth were a major concern regardless of contrast group membership. Dormitory students rely on the school bus to transport them to and from school; the bus makes one trip to the dormitory on Sunday and returns to the reservation the following Friday. Students often reported missing a week of school at a time because they would miss the bus to the dormitory at the beginning of each week.

While dormitory life was reported to be comfortable and fun, a few students, particularly dropouts, reported that the distractions of town life had a detrimental effect on their school attendance and progress. Students, however, did report that dormitory life could exert a positive influence on school progress since local university students provided after school tutoring and the dormitory provided resource materials and physical space for completing homework.

Students making a daily trip to school face a difficult transportation problem of a different sort. The bus ride from the reservation to school was an hour or more for many youth. In addition, many youth reported walking long distances from their homes to the bus stops. Our own observations of several of the bus stops indicate that the stops were merely designated pick-up points along the road with no shelter to protect students in bad weather, which includes snow and

sub-freezing temperatures. Parents fortunate to own cars often waited for the bus with their children in their cars during the winter months.

Both knowledgeables and students complained that the long distance to school prevented many students from participating in after school activities or completing their homework. Students leave home quite early in order to arrive at school on time, and leave immediately after school in order to arrive home by late afternoon or early evening. Bad winter weather compounds the transportation difficulty.

All three contrast groups faced distance problems. Non-town students in each group cited transportation as a problem. Non-town dropouts, however, cited distance and transportation as a major issue contributing to their decision to drop out. The "hassles" of having to get to the dormitory on time and having to leave their families on schooldays were contrasted to the potential benefits of dormitory life, which included food, lodging and clothing. Further, these dropouts cited the long bus rides and problems in "getting up in the morning" as leading to absenteeism and lose of interest. These youth also reported that the long distances prevented them from completing their homework, which contributed to their poor school performance. One knowledgeable suggested that some parents discouraged their children from going to school on cold winter days because of the necessity of waiting with the student at the bus stop.

Distance to school tends to be a problem in any school system that encompasses rural areas. Distance to school has been a historical problem for Navajos, who have until recently been a nomadic population following their herds of sheep from one grazing area to another. Families in the present study were more stable than might have been expected in the past. Families largely lived in one home, no longer moving from area to area. Still, the distance to school and the difficulties accompanying the transportation of students exert a large negative force on high-risk students.

Clearly, many graduates and college-bound students suffered the same transportation problems as did the dropouts. Yet, graduates and college-bound students overcame the distance problem and continuing in school. While all three contrast groups mentioned distance and transportation as a problem, dropouts viewed transportation issues as a factor in their decision to drop out.

Several dropouts reported doing quite well academically in elementary school, with performance diminishing in junior high and high school. Dropouts had difficulty keeping up in their school work and homework. As the students experienced more failure, they reported missing the bus more and complaining that the long bus rides left little time to complete their homework or to relax during the school year. Thus, it may be that for high-risk students, distance and transportation problems combine with achievement problems to form a vicious process leading to early withdrawal from school.

Reasonable speculation would suggest that distance and transportation problems serve as a tipping point or barrier for all non-town students. The positive incentives for school are so great for graduates and college bound students that distance, while a "hassle," is overcome. For dropouts, the problems of distance and transportation, combined with low incentives to continue in school, compound each other and lead to a decision to drop out.

It appears reasonable that distance and transportation for all Navajo youth living on the reservation, regardless of their eventual school outcome, are a negative aspect of school life. Two recommendations were suggested by the youth and knowledgeables regarding transportation. First, bus shelters should be installed to protect the youth during the winter months. Shelters could ease the harsh conditions at the bus stops and free many parents from having to wait for the bus with their children. School officials, however, report

that shelters have been under discussion with parents in the past. Providing shelters may pose a security risk for the children and therefore must be monitored by school personnel or parent volunteers. Second, students traveling to school from the reservation should be provided time during the school day to complete their homework. Extra study time at school would ensure that students have the opportunity to complete their school work before traveling the long distance back to their homes.

Exploratory Hypothesis #5: Future Orientation

> Dropouts, graduates, and college-bound students differ in their orientation toward the future.

A number of knowledgeables suggested that future orientation may distinguish dropouts from other Navajo youth. Specifically, they suggested that Navajo dropouts lack any plans for the future and did not connect their actions at school with post-school consequences such as future employment possibilities.

Orientation toward the future may be conceptualized in psychological terms as an indicator of perceptions of personal causation; that is, more specific future plans indicate a perception that one's actions (e.g., plans) cause the outcome of events. Much psychological research have been conducted demonstrating the relationship between feelings of personal responsibility for one's actions and academic achievement (see, e.g., Chan, 1978; deCharms, 1972). It has been suggested that feelings of personal responsibility, or internal locus of control, leads to greater task persistence, better academic achievement, and sound mental health. On the other side, feelings that luck or external forces control future events lead to low motivation and inaction. Thus, students with specific plans for the future are more likely to believe that it is their behavior or actions that lead to the consequences in their lives, while students with no

plans for the future are more likely to believe that their efforts do not lead to future consequences.

In the current case study, youth were asked to decribe their plans for the next five years. As predicted, college-bound youth had very specific plans for the next five years. In general, they planned to go to college and had specific college majors and post-college professions in mind. Graduates had some notion of the future; each planned to work and hoped that their work-study experiences would provide the skills necessary for full-time jobs. Many graduates planned to go on to community colleges or vocational schools for more job training. Their plans, however, were not as specific as those given by collegebound students.

Dropouts provide a sharp contrast to other Navajo youth. Their future plans were quite vague. Many dropped out of school to work. Yet, only one dropout was working full-time and one worked part-time. When asked about the future, their plans were vague and the specifics of their goals were limited to getting a job that paid well. Dropouts did not define their career goals beyond "working," and few had any plans to advance their job marketability. Some notion that dropping out of school would be a disadvantage in job hunting was not coupled with any plans to rectify their circumstances. Many dropouts experienced a desire to finish school but had no concrete notion on how to accomplish that goal.

It would appear that from the substance of the interviews, dropouts, graduates and college-bound students did differ in their orientation or plans for the future. Dropouts have relatively vague plans for the future and do not seem to link current actions or plans with future consequences. This external perception of causation is remediable through intervention. Counselors and teachers aware of the potential hazards of external perceptions of causation can help students understand that actions lead to consequences, and planning

courses of action can influence future outcomes. Counselors can help students plan their school careers and demonstrate that each step is linked to the next. Career counseling should include not only career opportunities but descriptions of pathways leading to careers. Finally, personal causation is not developed suddenly in adolescence, but is a product of childhood socialization. Elementary school teachers should be encouraged to ensure that children link their actions with the consequences of their behavior. Teachers can encourage students to plan for the future and provide opportunities for student decision-making in learning opportunities. A number of authors have suggested how personal causation can be assured and remediated (see, Chan, 1978; deCharms, 1972).

Summary

The analyses in this section of the report focused on five exploratory hypotheses. First, the influence of family environment on school outcome was explored. It was found that almost all of the Navajo youth in the present study came from Navajo-speaking backgrounds. While Navajo was the dominant home language in early childhood, many of the youth shifted to English by high school and reported excellent fluency in both languages. Indeed, the most successful students (college-bound graduates) were for the most part Navajo/English bilinguals.

Next, the influence of traditionalism on school outcome was explored. Traditionalism did not appear to be a negative factor in our sample of youth. Indeed, dropouts appeared to be more contemporary than college-bound graduates. College-bound graduates reported living in moderate households which maintain some Navajo traditions while incorporating non-Navajo life styles.

Third, critical markers could not be identified from the available data that could serve as early warning signals of potential dropouts. Some achievement differences were noted as well as absentee rates, but by and large the data to conduct a careful historical records analysis could not be located, given the limited resources of the project.

Distance and transportation problems were found to contribute to the educational problems faced by Navajo youth. All students residing on the reservation, regardless of school outcome, reported distance to school and transportation problems as a negative incentive to go to school. Travel time interfered with school activities, homework time, and recreation time.

Future orientation was the fifth exploratory hypothesis under investigation. Dropouts were found to be quite vague in their future plans and goals, while graduate and college-bound students had relatively concrete plans and goals for the future. The interpretation of the findings related to each of these hypotheses is discussed in Section V following a case history of each of the dropouts in our study in Section IV.

IV. CASE HISTORIES

The following section presents a series of six brief case histories on the dropouts selected for this study. Each case history summarizes the youth's family background, language experience, and school experiences. Relevant information regarding why the youth chose to drop out of school early is also presented. The data for the case histories come from analyses of the intensive interviews with each youth. The names used in the case histories are pseudonyms.

Case 1: Mary

Mary is 18 years old and has lived on the Navajo reservation all her life. She was born on the reservation, as were her mother, father, three sisters and one brother. She is the second of five children. Mary describes her family as very traditional. Her family wears traditional clothes and adheres to traditional customs. Her family speaks mostly Navajo, and although Mary is fluent in English, she usually speaks Navajo in most situations.

Neither of Mary's parents attended school. Her older sister dropped out of school early and her younger siblings are still attending school. Mary reported that her family believes that the family should come before school and education.

Throughout her school career, Mary's family did not receive a daily newspaper and Mary did not have a special place to study within the home. She did have access to a dictionary and other books. Her home had electricity and her family subscribed to some magazines.

Mary did not remember anyone reading to her before she entered school. Her parents were not active in school affairs and never, according to Mary, visited the school for any reason.

Mary went to boarding school during her elementary school years. Living away from home during the school year, she returned to her home on some weekends, holidays, and summer. Thinking back to her elementary school days, she reported enjoying school a lot, but, unlike most youth, could not remember anything specific that she liked. Her elementary school attendance was reportedly very good, which Mary attributes to pressure from the boarding school staff to attend, rather than to her own personal incentive. She believes she was a fair student and learned a little during elementary school.

As for junior high, Mary traveled from the reservation to town each day to attend the public school, which amounted to a total of 100 miles a day round-trip. She also enjoyed junior high, but again could not recall anything specific she enjoyed. She reported attending often and being a fair student.

Mary cited the long bus rides to school as a major problem leading to her early withdrawal. When it snowed, she would be absent from school quite frequently. She remembered that her counselors provided her help, but she felt her teachers and counselors did not have an interest in her. Mary dropped out of school during the ninth grade and has no plans for the future. She is presently unemployed and is just "hanging around."

Case 2: John

John had just celebrated his 20th birthday at the time of the interview. He was born on the reservation and lived there all his life. John lives with his mother, who also was born and raised on the reservation. It was unclear who else lived with John and his mother. His mother had never attended school.

John describes his family as contemporary. They live in new housing and have all the modern conveniences. His mother believes that education is the most important goal for John, but John reported that he had strong ideas about his own future and how he wanted to live his life.

Navajo was the first language spoken by John; he spoke no other language before he started school. He reports speaking both Navajo and English at home now and he reports being fluent in both languages.

John attended boarding school through the 8th grade. The boarding school was well stocked with educational materials, but John reported that during elementary school, his home had no electricity, newspaper, and no special place to study. By junior high, John's family moved to their present home and had newspapers, magazines, books, and other school-like materials available.

In the area of parent participation, John did not remember anyone reading to him before he started school. John did not recall if his parents participated in school activities nor did he remember them ever visiting school.

In junior high, John lived in the in-town dormitory. He liked the dormitory but often missed whole weeks of school because he would miss the bus back to the dormitory after a weekend at home. Missing whole weeks of school placed him further and further behind.

He rated himself a good student in elementary school and only a fair student in high school. He remembered taking ESL courses and a Navajo history class. He also remembered getting help from school administrators and local university tutors. He enjoyed sports and clubs at school and in the dormitory, but had problems with his homework.

Problems with homework were, in fact, cited as his major reasons for dropping out. He enjoyed new freedoms after acquiring a car, which also hurt his school work. He recognized the need to finish high school but dropped out during the 11th grade. He is currently unemployed and has no concrete plans for the future.

Case 3: Fred

At the time of the interview Fred was 19 years old. Fred was born on the reservation. During the first five years of his life, Fred lived with his grandparents. He attend two different boarding schools for first and second grades, and stayed with his grandparents in the summers and holidays. His grandfather died when he was in the third grade, after which Fred moved into town to live with his mother and stepfather. He attended two additional schools to complete his elementary school education and enrolled in his local junior high school.

Fred's mother and stepfather were also born on the reservation. His mother was 19 years old when Fred was born. She did not attend school and currently works as a maid/cook. Fred's stepfather graduated from high school and is currently a custodian. Fred does not know much about his natural father other than that he was Navajo. When asked for details about his father, Fred reported that he knew very little about him and did not care to know more. Fred also lives with a younger brother, sister and grandmother. Fred's younger brother also dropped out of school; his grandmother is 93 years old and is a sheep herder and weaver.

Navajo was and continues to be the primary language in Fred's home. When he entered school he spoke only Navajo. At home, Navajo is the dominant language spoken between family members. At school, Fred reports speaking mainly English to his friends and teachers. He would like to speak Navajo at school, but finds that many people don't

understand it. He has even taught himself to read and write a little Navajo, which is unusual for even the most educated or traditional Navajos.

Fred remembers his grandfather and stepfather reading or telling him stories as a child. These stories were both in English and in Navajo. His grandfather, in particular, told him many stories about Navajo history and culture during his elementary school year. His home had some books and magazines but no daily newspapers. A daily newspaper was asvailable in his home during and after junior high school.

In Fred's family schooling and education are strongly valued. His parents' "dream" is for Fred to learn to read and write English and get a good job. Only his stepfather has completed high school, so Fred reports a great deal of encouragement to finish school.

Fred's early elementary school years were spent in a boarding school that he describes as harsh and mean. He reported instances of beatings and verbal abuse by school staff. Coming into town and attending public school was seen as very positive and very enjoyable. He particularly enjoyed the stimulation of the city and what he describes as friendly teachers.

He enjoyed junior high school and thought the teachers were interested in him and were helpful. His grades weren't very good, however. In junior high school, he began to get into fights. He attended school regularly until his grades and school work started to decline. He felt embarrassed by his work and would "ditch" school when he had to take tests. His parents caught on to this behavior and began monitoring him more closely.

Fred recalls one big event that prompted him to leave school early. During the tenth grade, he got into a fight with another boy at a party. He stayed out of school for two weeks because he was

embarrassed to face his friends. He fell behind in school and eventually dropped out. Fred wanted to return to school, but felt he would let everyone down, including his principal and counselors, whom he viewed as supportive. He began participating with gangs and in minor juvenile crime activities. He was sent to juvenile detention hall for a short period during the ninth grade.

In addition to the fights, Fred missed school because he worked nights until 3:15 a.m. His part-time busboy job eventually lengthened to full-time work, which interfered with his school work.

Fred believes that the school staff did all they could to keep him in school, but that he let them down. He stated, "I'm the one who messed up . . . everyone was nice, but I changed." Fred believed that he was too far behind in school to remain and the boys he fought with were still there to cause him trouble. After several weeks in the tenth grade he dropped out. He is presently unemployed and has no plans for the future.

Case 4: Joe

Joe was 18 years old at the time of the interview. He was born on the reservation and lived with his aunt and uncle since he was two days old. He has been legally adopted by his aunt and uncle, whom he considers his "mother" and "father" and are reported as such here. Soon after his birth, his family moved into town.

Joe's "mother" was also born on the reservation. She received her Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED) and is currently working in a factory. His "father" is not Navajo. He is Mexican-American and speaks Spanish well. He works at a white collar job for the city. Joe also lives with an older "brother" who is a truck driver and two younger "sisters" still in school.

English and Spanish were the languages used in Joe's home when he was growing up. Very little Navajo was spoken, since his "father" spoke only English and Spanish. Joe's first language was English and he reports no fluency in Navajo. English is the primary language used in his home.

While no special study area was available in his home, Joe reported having newspapers, books and other educational materials in his home. He recalls his "mother" and "father" reading to him when he was a child. His mother used to help him with his homework. The family was described as non-traditional and contemporary in their living style and beliefs.

Thinking back on his educational history, Joe enjoyed elementary school a fair amount. He particularly enjoyed physical activities but didn't like math. He attended school-regularly. The school was only a few blocks from his home.

In junior high school Joe liked all the sports activities, but didn't like English composition. He believes he learned a fair amount. The contents of some of his courses were not of interest to him and he didn't like his teachers. He felt he did well in junior high school at first, but his performance began to decline. He felt he "couldn't relate" to his teachers or the courses. Joe also reports being placed in an English Navajo bilingual classroom even though he speaks no Navajo.

Joe was retained in the 11th grade because he lacked the credits for promotion. After being retained, he didn't feel he needed school. He felt it was boring and routine. He also reported getting involved with drugs, which kept him too "high" to attend school.

Joe wanted to leave school to find a job and take a break from school. He wanted earn his own money. He frequently missed school near the end of his school career, which placed him further and further behind. He was suspended a few times and dropped out of school during his second year in the 11th grade. At present, he is in a youth employment program, employed as a public grounds maintenance person for the city.

Case 5: Shirley

Shirley is 17 years old. She was born and raised on the reservation and currently lives on the reservation with her mother and father. Her mother finished the sixth grade; no information on the father's education was known by Shirley. Neither her mother nor her father are currently employed. Shirley has an older brother who did finish high school.

Shirley attended several elementary schools on the reservation. First, she lived with her parents and attended the local public school 22 miles from her house. In the fourth grade she went to live with her older brother in a different area of the reservation. This was approximately 150 miles from her parents. She remained with her brother through junior high school and transferred to the in-town high school in the tenth grade. The high school was 67 miles one way from her home.

Navajo was the primary language in Shirley's home. English was also spoken and Shirley reported being bilingual by the time she entered school. Presently, the languages spoken in her home are evenly divided between Navajo and English.

During elementary school, Shirley reported not having many educational materials available to her, including newspapers, books, or magazines, nor did she have a special place to study. She does not

remember anyone ever reading to her before she started school. By junior high school, most of the educational materials generally found in homes were also found in her home. In addition, electricity was introduced to her home when she started junior high. Shirley now rates her family as contemporary and non-traditional.

Shirley enjoyed elementary school. She liked arts and crafts, but felt frustrated by math. She also enjoyed junior high school very much, especially the sports activities. In both these settings she felt she learned a lot and had good teachers.

By high school, her enjoyment tapered off to just a fair rating. The long bus ride to shcool was seen as a problem. She claims the bus often didn't come or was late due to bad weather conditions.

Shirley didn't remember anyone (including her parents, teachers, counselors and others around her), being particularly interested in her school progress. Her parents did participate in school activities often and they attended parent-teacher meetings.

Shirley had a difficult time adjusting to high school. She didn't remember getting any special counseling or help. The bus ride to school was difficult for her and eventually combined with her feelings of alienation from school to cause her to drop out after the 11th grade. Currently, she is unemployed and has no plans for the future.

Case 6: Dan

Dan was 18 years old at the time of the interview. He was born on the reservation. He lives with his mother, father, three older brothers and three older sisters. His mother and father were also born on the reservation. His mother completed the third grade and is now unemployed. His father completed the eighth grade and is a retired lumberman.

Two brothers work in meat packing plants. One sister works in construction, while another works as a secretary. One brother and one sister are unemployed.

English is the predominant language in Dan's home. Navajo is prominent, however, and is sometimes used by Dan when communicating with his parents and friends.

Dan's home environment included a daily newspaper, books, magazines, and other school-like materials. Dan also remembers his mother and father reading him fairy tales as a young child.

Dan attended elementary school close to his home. Before entering public school, he attended a catholic preschool. In junior high school Dan enrolled in a boarding school not far from his home. In the ninth grade Dan attended a boarding high school which was 175 miles from home. For tenth grade, Dan enrolled in the in-town dormitory. On weekends he traveled 70 miles each way from school to home and back.

Dan describes his home as modern or non-traditional. His mother and father valued education above all other concerns and wanted their children to finish school. He was often told by his parents that no education meant no jobs.

In high school Dan reported that he often missed school because he would not return to the dormitory on time. He would arrive late Monday rather than Sunday. He liked school and remembers receiving special help. He did remember getting into trouble from time to time for what he describes as minor pranks like lighting fire crackers.

Dan felt discouraged from continuing in school. He thought he lived too far from school and wanted to work to earn money for his family. He was absent too many days and was dropped by the school

district on a number of occasions for excessive unexcused absences. He was suspended from school in the tenth grade and reenrolled the following year. After repeating the 11th grade, Dan dropped out of school. Currently, he is working part-time and has no concrete plans for the future.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This case study of Navajo youth reveals several important problems that may be addressed by school policy-makers. Caution, however, must be exercised in that the design of the study does not allow for firm or definitive conclusions. Rather, the case study methodology allows for the preliminary exploration of informed hypotheses which require further examination. With this caution in place, it is reasonable to speculate about several important policy issues.

Language. It would appear that most of the Navajo youth in the present study had strong Navajo language backgrounds in early childhood. It should be recalled that the Navajo language continues to be an important part of Navajo culture and life style and that over 93% of all students in the study came from Navajo-speaking backgrounds. Those students who acquired and used English at home, however, appear to be less at-risk of dropping out of school than other youth. While many of these students maintained their Navajo language skills and use Navajo in many situations, English was also used in their homes and community settings. It would seem important to encourage Navajo youth to maintain the Navajo language while at the same time acquiring strong English competence. Such a balance in language development would ensure the possibility that Navajo youth can adequately communicate within their family and cultural community and at the same time function in school and in the larger society.

Traditionalism. We found no evidence that traditionalism or the adherence to "old Navajo ways" impeded the educational development of Navajo youth. Indeed, it was found that dropouts reported living in contemporary families, while college-bound students reported living in moderate households which blend traditional Navajo values with modern contemporary standard. It was suggested that the generation of Navajo youth studied in the present investigation represent Navajos in

transition from traditional Navajo life to modern Navajo life. Youth who experience a rapid transition from traditional to modern life styles may experience cultural normlessness; that is, while their families relinquish old values, modern contemporary norms are not well integrated. on the other hand, Navajo youth who live in moderate households have the benefit of stable Navajo cultural values while at the same time experiencing the integration of new contemporary norms.

If future studies bear out our speculation, than educators may help Navajo youth maintain Navajo values while also helping them obtain new values and behaviors. Educators would be required to learn about the Navajo way of life and establish close communications between themselves and Navajo parents and community leaders. Children representing the generation of change require careful counseling and understanding.

Critical markers. One disappointment in the present study was the inability to establish critical markers that could lead to the early identification of high-risk Navajo youth. Limitations in the study resources and design prevented an exhaustive search for and re-creation of student histories and records.

Our limited examination of student records confirmed the fact that high absenteeism in junior and senior high school is an important warning sign of the potential early withdrawal of Other early warning signs may be the failure to complete homework and subsequently falling behind in coursework. Interestingly, academic achievement was not remarkably different among the contrast groups except, perhaps, in the area of mathematics. It should be noted, however, that none of our sample, including the college-bound students, met minimum standards set by the school district in reading and language achievement.

An analysis of courses revealed that high school dropouts often leave school before they were eligible for "life relevant" courses such

as work-study programs and vocational training classes. School districts may choose to design some of these vocational oriented course for inclusion before the ninth grade.

Finally, the major conclusion in the analysis of critical markers is that judicious record keeping needs to be coordinated among the various authorities that control American Indian education. American Indians have the option of attending schools controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the local public education agency, the tribal government, or private and religious organizations. Record keeping among these agencies should be coordinated and student records transferred automatically whenever a student transfers. With more coordinated record keeping, teachers and counselors responsible for the education of American Indian students would be able to coordinate the curriculum better, identify potential long-term educational problems, diagnosis problem patterns, and coordinate the educational planning and goals of these students more effectively.

Distance. Distance from school and transportation problems encountered by Navajo youth appear to be a continuing problem for all youth residing on the reservation. Either the youth must leave home and live in the in-town dormitory during the school week, or the youth must travel long distances by bus daily to school. Dormitory life has certain advantages: Educational materials are guaranteed to be available and the youth from very low-income homes are provided food, clothing, and shelter. The disadvantages may be that the lack of family involvement and parental supervision not compensated for by generally competent staff relations and supervision may result in some youth being lured to in-town "attractions" detrimental to their development.

For youth traveling each day to school from the reservation, two suggestions appear to be concrete and merit consideration. First, an examination of bus stops on the reservation should be made to determine

the necessity for the construction of bus shelters. Would the installation of bus shelters improve school attendance and provide additional incentive for students to continue in school? Would bus shelters lessen the burden and fear of parents during the cold winter months and lead them to encourage their children to attend school regardless of weather conditions? This point is particularly important since it was noted that increased absenteeism is a marker for potential youth withdrawal and is most certainly related to a decline in school performance.

Second, schools should consider providing reservation students with time during the school day to complete their homework. A common complaint among all bused students was the inadequate amount of time they had to complete their homework assignments. One could easily imagine the most motivated students working on their homework assignments during the long bus rides to and from school. It is also reasonable to speculate that reading and concentrating on school working during the long bus ride is not the most conducive or rewarding atmosphere in which to learn. Therefore, it might be an advantage for both the potentially failing and the normally achieving student to have an opportunity to complete homework during school hours. By providing assistance to students to complete their homework, the schools could monitor student progress closely and assist the high-risk student from falling "further and further behind."

Future orientation. As predicted, student outcome was related to personal planning and orientation towards the future. College-bound graduates were found to have concrete plans for the future and realized that their plans and actions would lead to some future result. Graduates had somewhat less concrete plans but did have some notion that their actions would result in future jobs or lead to other results. Dropouts, on the other hand, were quite vague about their future plans; they seemed not to recognize that they must plan and act

on their plans to accomplish some goals. Dropouts had neither concrete plans nor concrete goals.

This lack of future orientation evident among the dropouts may be symptomatic of a more underlying psychological or motivational difficulty. Dropouts do not appear to link their actions (or inactions) to the circumstances of their lives. Dropouts often left school in order to work, yet only one held a full-time job after he left school, and only one worked part-time. All were vague about what they would do to improve their employability but did recognize that dropping out of school would be a handicap. If these youth do not understand the relationship between their actions and the consequences or circumstances of their lives, then what motivates them to improve their abilities or prepared themselves for the future? This external orientation towards life, or the feeling that luck, fate, or others determines what happens in one's life, is associated with low motivation, low achievement, and poor mental health.

Educators can assist students to link their actions to their consequences. Early in elementary school, teachers can help students understand that their efforts and persistence lead to positive outcomes. Academic tasks can be designed to demonstrate to children that their output leads to task completion. Teachers can also explain to students that their grades, achievements and accomplishments are not a matter of luck or of the teacher's kindness, but rather a product of the student's abilities and efforts.

Junior and senior high school counselors can ensure that students become involved in their educational planning. Educational planning should have clear rationales and outcomes which the student understands and appreciates. College and vocational planning should help students understand that their futures are not a matter of luck or of natural ability but are a function of careful planning and hard work. Hard work, however, must be a reward independent of the quality of

the outcome. Teachers and counselors should not ignore the importance of a strong effort independent of a "perfect paper"; to discourage effort would lead to low motivation, lack of task persistence, and the feeling that one's behavior and effort is inconsequential, since ability or the teacher's judgement determine consequences. Students should be encouraged to work hard and be rewarded for working hard independent of the quality of the work accomplished.

The last word. Finally, more questions arose during our investigation than we were able to answer. This small case study only illuminated some of the most superficial problems facing Navajo youth. The study did demonstrate the need for many more studies of Navajo youth and the educational programs in which they are a part. Future studies may focus on confirming or rejecting the speculation outlined in the current effort. Must more information on the relationship between language experience and school outcome is needed. The identification of critical markers to make early identification of high-risk youth is a important goal. To accomplish this goal, assistance must be provided to coordinate record keeping and determine what factors should be monitored.

Much more information on the relationships between family socialization practices and educational experiences are required. Are Navajo family socialization practices in conflict with the expectations of education? Can curriculum be developed and teachers trained to maximize Navajo learning characteristics in the classroom?

Finally, the psychological development of Navajo youth bears some future attention. Navajo youth are the generation in transition. Until recently the Navajo nation has remained somewhat isolated from the mainstream of American life. Now, however, with the industrialization of the Southwest and with modern tribal leadership, the Navajo nation is making great strides towards more contemporary life styles.

Many Navajos are living and working off the reservation and many Navajo youth are attending colleges and entering the full range of professions. What impact this transition will have on the generation in transition bears careful study.

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